

1 Interview Summaries

1.1 Northern Maine Development Commission

Interview Type	Council of Government, Economic Development, Regional Planning.
Interview Location	Caribou, Maine
Interview Date	November 9, 2001
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Interviewer	Thomas Burns agismap1@maine.rr.com
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Budget	\$2,200,000 (Does not include Revolving Loan Programs)
URL:	http://nmdc.org

1.1.1 Agency Overview

Northern Maine Development Commission offers Economic Development, Business Finance, Small Business Counseling and Planning services. It is a regional organization supported by dues-paying member communities. It began as the Northern Maine Planning Commission in 1967. Over time, many regional planning functions, economic development programs, cooperative buying programs, transportation projects and socio-economic initiatives have been undertaken by the various agencies housed under NMDC's umbrella.

A list of official affiliations is posted on for their web site and reprinted here:

- Northern Maine Economic Development District
- Maine Small Business Development Center
- Associate Development Company under SBA
- Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership Field Office
- Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
- U.S. Census Data Center Affiliate
- Regional Planning Commission
- Accredited Economic Development Organization

1.1.2 GIS Initiatives

Since at least 1987, NMDC has had a mapping department that used primarily hard copy methods to make maps. Their early GIS efforts centered around the MapGraphics software on an Apple MacIntosh computer. When Robert Clark became Executive Director in 1990, the GIS initiative was strengthened.

Primarily, the GIS is used to support Comprehensive Planning maps. Increasingly, however, the GIS Coordinator is spotting opportunities to encourage use of ArcView on municipal desktops. He is planning on educational sessions on a one-on-one basis or in small groups.

In 2000, a professional GIS Needs Assessment done for the NMDC GIS program was undertaken. It reaffirmed that GIS is a central business operation. The GIS Program has been the recipient of several grants over the years to increase the NMDC's GIS capacity including a significant Housing and Urban Development Empowerment Zone grant.

The GIS Coordinator has made an effort to collect as many data sets as possible that cover Aroostook County and Somerset County. There have been several attempts at developing parcel composites, some more successful than others. In some cases, the GIS coordinator had to work with a collection of hand sketches since this particular town had no traditional assessor hardcopy maps.

1.1.2.1 Overview of GIS Utilization

GIS is not widely in use among NMDC member communities. Awareness is growing among town managers but the pace of GIS Implementation is slow. In addition to illustrating Comprehensive Plans, the GIS has been used for some Industrial Park siting maps and for several bike corridor studies and scenic byway maps.

1.1.2.2 GIS Operating Environment and Infrastructure

The GIS program has one dedicated staff member. They have migrated most of the vector data from the MacIntosh to ArcView which runs on a 1.5 gigahertz Pentium III running Windows 2000. They use a Calcomp digitizer and have a D-size HP DesignJet 650C. They do not have significant amounts of storage space and have archived much of their data on CDs. They have purchased a hand-held Trimble GPS, the Geo-Explorer, which is capable of 3 meter accuracy. Their internet connection is a cable connection with Time Warner 'Road Runner' service.

NMDC is running ArcView 3.2a. However, NMDC has purchased ArcGIS 8.1 including most of the modules and ArcPress. As of November, 2001 this software was not yet installed. The GIS Coordinator stated that ArcView 3.2a would be their 'workhorse.'

The GIS Coordinator officially reports to the Director of Planning.

1.1.2.3 GIS Data Resources and Requirements

NMDC has made use of all datasets to be found on the Maine OGIS web site. For their Comprehensive Planning efforts, NMDC is often in the position of digitizing parcel lines. In some cases, these automated parcels have not been geo-referenced but have been used as composites in hardcopy mapping efforts. For the most part, the composites do not necessarily have unique ids with associated assessor files. In some cases, automated assessor files do not exist.

1.1.2.3.1 Spatial Data

Existing data sets include:

All existing OGIS data layers
USGS DOQQS
Zoning Layers

Various Natural Resource data sets

Basemap features:

1:24,000 scale USGS topographic quad-based datasets.

1.1.2.3.2 Attribute Data

Attribute data is not the focus of their GIS efforts as yet. They have made some use of census data and its attributes but the typical attributes from NRCS Soils data, Natural Resources layers (NWI), and landcover values are not dealt with to any degree of complexity. Manipulation of assessor datasets attached to parcel composites was a rarity as well. However, NMDC is clearly aware of the potential to use these attribute data.

1.1.2.3.3 Data Issues

NMDC has focused on basic GIS operations and is somewhat challenged by attribute data of any complexity that is associated with spatial datasets. One problem has been the migration of data from the MapGraphics software on the PowerMac to the Windows-based ArcView application. For instance, the NRCS soils data were scanned and coded with the NRCS MapUnit Symbol number but in the export DXF operation, only the linework was retained. In-depth understanding or the ability to access the NRCS soils schema associated with the Statsgo (1:250,000) datasets or the Cowardin codes associated with the National Wetlands Inventory pose challenges for NMDC staff. In addition, if data cannot be found on the OGIS web site, then the search and acquisition of other state agency or federal datasets prove problematic.

1.1.2.4 GIS Applications and Application Requirements

Planned future GIS activity and applications:

The issues that surfaced which will dictate some of their future GIS activities include: GIS outreach efforts in small groups; MeDOT road study being conducted by Vanasse, Hangen, Brustlin (VHB); and, continuing grant writing featuring their GIS capability.

1.1.3 Other Relevant Issues:

NMDC was reluctant to consider becoming a potential data portal for their region. While they do create original data such as future land use plans, zoning maps, bikeways etc., they seemed unwilling or unprepared to formalize those datasets for further re-distribution.

1.1.4 Major Benefits and Cost Justification

Dues-paying members of NMDC, were eager to have NMDC play the role of regional GIS expert. Having NMDC play that role relieves the communities of that task. The benefit to NMDC is that there is consensus around – as opposed to competition – regarding having NMDC play a lead role in all things GIS.

Aside from the benefits of using GIS to inform regional planning issues, GIS is perceived to help NMDC better compete for federal grants. Federal Grantors clearly state that GIS is an attractive plus and an indicator of having an effective planning capability.